

THE BIBLE CODE EXAMINED

January 26, 1998 (Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org) -

The following article is by Dr. Gary Cohen. It was sent to us by Dr. Douglas Pruiett <pruiett@sprintmail.com>, Senior Chaplain, Brevard County Detention Center, Sharpes, Florida, who has given permission for its distribution --

New revelations are exciting! Such excitement we have rarely seen as has been recently stirred up by Michael Drosnin's new book, "The Bible Code" (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. ISBN 0-684-81079-4).

Codes and mysteries have always intrigued people, and rightly so. When Sherlock Holmes confronted a secret code in A. Conan Doyle's, "The Adventure of the Dancing Men," half of England's population was transfixed wondering what those little drawings of stick men could possibly spell out in code. ("The Strand Magazine", London: December 1903.)

For years, books and pamphlets have been written urging that the history of the world was revealed long ago by a code used in the lengths of the passageways of the Great Pyramid, one inch for a year. The famed Christian prophetic interpreter, Clarence Larkin, joined in this advocacy! (See his "Dispensational Truth", Glenside, PA: Larkin Estate, 1920, pp. 164-169).

So here, in examining "The Bible Code," we are concerned with another secret code which we are told spelled out 3400 years ago events of our own day, and even many still-future events which are soon to occur. Wow! We all love to discover secrets. At Faith Seminary, housed in the multi-million dollar Widner Estate Mansion in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, is a miniature of Versailles in Paris. As a student, I once leaned against a wall and felt a tiny lever embedded on the bottom edge of a piece of wooden molding. I pushed it, almost without thinking, and a secret door in the wall sprang open. I presume no one there today knows of this secret room. We love mysteries!

A black slab, about 2 feet by 3 feet, was found in 1799 by Napoleon's soldiers at the north end of the Nile delta at Rosetta. This "Rosetta Stone" had writing upon it in three languages -- Greek, Demotic, and ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics -- the latter, unreadable for almost two thousand years. When the young French professor Champollion deciphered the mysterious Egyptian picture writing in 1831, it was really exciting. Similarly, when the English military officer Rawlinson discovered the writings in 1835 on the cliff of the Behistun Rock in Persia and then by 1851 had the first of the three cuneiform languages on that rock--Akkadian, which was old Babylonian--translated, that, too, was exciting! These two discoveries opened the details of the previously hidden histories of ancient Egypt and Babylon to the modern world. That was exciting!

Then, too, when Professor Sukenik, Yigael Yadin's father, first looked at the Dead Sea Scrolls on November 29, 1947, that was exciting! The same was true in 1975 when the two Italian archaeologists, Paulo Matthiae (the digger) and Giovanni Pettinato (the language person), discovered over 20,000(!) tablets at Tell Mardikh ("Ebla"), and humans could read these Sumerian-like writings that were penned in clay some four thousand years ago!

Today, people are asking if Michael Drosnin has uncovered another such block-buster discovery and that a secret code has been discovered that was penned in the Bible some 3400 years ago by Moses himself, or by God through Moses. This must be analyzed in steps, admitting that in such a brief article as this, the claims of so much of the 232-page book cannot be adequately examined. We will now present and examine eight items briefly, which hopefully may assist our readers to better understand the issues involved in "The Bible Code."

FIRST, let me explain to the reader who may not have had an opportunity to examine this book that "The Bible Code" claims in its Introduction that ". . . there is a code in the Bible, and in a few dramatic cases it has foretold events that then happened exactly as predicted" (p. 11).

Here we must note that the basic idea of a "code" is an encrypted message, in this case purposely and knowingly transmitted and inscripturated, via God through Moses, which hopefully has an intelligent decoder (be it machine or human) in mind, and which conveys some sort of intelligent and understandable message. Needless to say, for the vast majority of the readers of "Zion's Fire," the Bible does convey an inscripturated divine message to man from God. However, it is not in a mysterious code; rather it was and is presented in a known and readable language of mankind. The Cabalists hunted for endless numeric "messages" in the Old Testament, and the Gnostics, or "Knowing Ones," likewise claimed their secret knowledge over and in addition to the New Testament. Thus Paul speaks to the Colossians, who were being assaulted by Gnostic knowers of secret messages, and says, "In whom {Christ} are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). His point is that in the scriptural study of and in the spiritual fellowship with Christ you will find all the knowledge you require. There is no need to look to people with "secret" revelations or, may we suggest, secret number codes.

The essence of a code-sender here is lacking, as the randomization of letters gives no guidance whatsoever -- with or without the use of a computer -- to the content of the message sent. Even a scrawled word from antiquity such as "Croatoan," the lone word found on a tree in 1591 -- the farewell message of the settlers at Roanoke who were probably murdered -- had some intention. The mere existence of a randomized, almost infinite pool of letters, be they Hebrew or any other language, conveys nothing of sense or guidance. It cannot be called a code or a message any more than I could claim that Campbell Soup Company was sending my mother's name to me when as a child I discovered the letters M A R Y floating in my alphabet vegetable soup.

The reader may well note that the Old and New Testaments do not urge the faithful to hunt for secret messages in the Scriptures, but rather to study them diligently for their plain and bold message to turn to God in faith and to live a righteous life devoted to Him. Only in Revelation

13:18 is there a number code: "the number of the beast {Antichrist} . . . is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six" {i.e., 666}. Here the Bible student is informed that the Antichrist can be identified in some manner, some day, by his connection with the number 666. While the meaning of this has been debated for centuries, it is a specific item to be compared with my saying that "you will know my house by the number on the porch -- 1555." This lone item is far from any granting or urging of a license to search the entire Bible for number game clues.

Also, the odds can be explained in different ways. This summer I discovered that Dr. John Davis was in Singapore at the same time I was, and with some calling, we had breakfast together one morning. "John, what were the odds, that is, when we were at Grace Seminary together in 1964, that we would both be sitting in the New Asia Hotel in Singapore exactly on this very morning?"

Well, the odds could be explained as one in billions considering the population of the world and the square yards of space that cover the earth -- but, there we were. The odds might, in one sense, have been staggering, but the reality was simply explained and not totally astounding when intelligence and purposeful hunting were counted into the equation.

SECOND, the basis of the code was the typing out on a computer all of the words of the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, in Hebrew in a run-on manner (INARUNONMANNER); then printing it out in columns, line by line, one letter under another, so that word pools were formed. If we do it in English, it begins to look like the grid below, and in the words of the author himself, it comes to us in "crossword puzzle pattern" (p. 19).

INTHEBEGINNINGGODCREATEDTHEHEAVENSANDTHEEARTH
ANDTHEEARTHWASWITHOUTFORMANDVOIDANDDARKN

Here we must note that such a sliding grid that can go to any width actually presents almost an infinity of possible word spellings. Merely by widening the column by one letter or narrowing it by a letter, each letter in the second line and in all subsequent lines moves over a notch, and hence presents countless additional word spellings. Rather than claiming that the odds of finding such revelations as CLINTON and PRESIDENT on the same page and in different locations on the page -- the odds of finding modern names is actually high, especially since the finder can decide the Hebrew spelling of modern words. Do you spell "Clinton" with a Hebrew "caf" (C) or with a "kof" (K)? Answer: You can do what you want. Aren't we really dealing with the game of "Find the hidden words" rather than with Bible prophecy?

Also, the reader should realize that on every grid page presented in the book there are also countless foolish words that could be found that are not noted. Rather, only the words selected and thus "discovered" by the seeker are presented. An example of this will be presented later.

THIRD, two computer programs were used to form grids of various sizes, which then were examined (in the Hebrew) for words that might be spelled right to left, left to right, vertically, horizontally, diagonally, forward, and backwards (p. 11). Then, also, words were sought by having the computer look for words which might be formed through the counting of letters (in any direction) at regular intervals, such as every fourth letter, every seventh letter, or every forty-ninth letter, etc.

It should be clear to the reader at this point that we are playing a crossword game of "Find the word," or what I did as a child with alphabet vegetable soup -- first finding my mother's name, then my father's, and then the names of my aunts and cousins as I spooned the interesting media to my mouth. Granted, it is being done by a computer that can almost infallibly locate every last word, but it is not a sent message but rather an available set of letter combinations with which the diligent scrabble-type searcher may find whatever interests him, and disregard all other message words that do not fit the context. Plus, realize that each letter in the grid (except for those on the edges) has eight letters surrounding it, and thus eight possible directions to go to make a word. Then consider that if you can go in any of those eight directions and count letters at intervals, in any direction, say, every fifth letter, etc., then the opportunities for incorporating that letter into a meaningful word are not quite so rare after all.

FOURTH, it is claimed that the word "Torah" (Law, in Hebrew) was found encoded at the start of each of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy via the spelling of the word "T O R A H," letter by letter at intervals of fifty letters (p. 20).

Here we have an entirely separate issue. Personally, I do not challenge the idea that Moses or another in the other biblical books could have placed an acrostic code word, such as "Torah," in the Bible. In the past few years, however, I have seen some magazine articles claiming such, and when I counted out the letters in the Hebrew text, the claimed words were not there. Nevertheless, a purposeful ancient inclusion of a word is a far different matter than the claims that Moses named Bill CLINTON as PRESIDENT some 3400 years ago. It is my personal conclusion that Shakespeare's name was encrypted in the "English" Authorized Version by the King James Version writers in 1610 when he helped them word the psalms for meter, on his forty-sixth birthday, in Psalm 46; forty-six words down and forty-six words up (not including the "Selah", which was taken to be a rest or interval word). I also am inclined to accept that in Esther 5:4 -- at the crisis moment demanding God's providential help -- the name Jehovah (YHVH) was purposely encrypted in the Hebrew words, "Let the king and Haman come this day" (Hebrew: "Let-come the-king and-Haman this-day"). Here, the letters forming Jehovah (YHVH) begin each of the four Hebrew words.

Upon starting at the first "T" (tav) that one comes across in both Genesis and Exodus, and counting fifty letters, one does indeed find in both books the letters T O R H ("Torah"), Law. In the case of Exodus, the second letter in TORH was actually a vav (the word for "and," and thus pronounced "vi" rather than with the "oh" sound as in TORH). Some would say that it still can be the correct letter for a code; others would disagree. The word TORH was "not" so encrypted

in the case of the books of Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy as claimed, where in Deuteronomy a "yodh", not a "vav" (or holem "oh") is the fiftieth letter after the initial "tav". (I counted the letters in each several times.)

It appears, however, that here in Genesis and Exodus we do have an acrostic which I take as probably purposefully placed in the sacred text, very possibly by Moses himself. It could also have been positioned there by Ezra the Scribe, author of the Book of Ezra, and the Great Synagogue of his day which copied the Scriptures. In Hebrew there are various words that are spelled properly in two ways, and certain letters can be dropped or added with the exact same word (example: the English word "ax" or "axe"). By watching these words, the text could have been made to spell TORAH in fifty letter gaps without altering a word of the sacred text, and with God's providential approval. We do note that the letters spelling Torah (TORH) are letters very frequently used. Such an acrostic, apparently seen by some rabbis of old, need not startle us, nor does it question the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures. Moses may have, under God's providential guidance, placed such as a seal to the holiness of these books.

Some may not agree with my explanation above, but that the word TORH is encrypted in Genesis and Exodus, at the start of both books, is a fact that can be examined and confirmed by anyone with a Hebrew Bible, and I concur on this that it is too much to be a mere coincidence.

That Moses hid an acrostic of the four-letter word TORH ("Law, teaching, instruction") in the sacred text, however, is a long jump from the claim of "The Bible Code" that the Mosaic books name TIMOTHY McVEIGH as the 1995 bomber of the OKLAHOMA MURRAH BUILDING (pp. 117-120).

Again we note that the Hebrew spelling of the "Oklahoma" sound, and "Murrah," and "Timothy McVeigh" appear on three different grids or pages, and we are not told that they are necessarily consecutive. McVeigh is spelled out in the Hebrew as MKVVEE, in five-letter intervals. It thusly doesn't really name McVeigh, rather a series of such letters was located by the computer moving horizontally from right to left, while the name Timothy was located moving from bottom to top -- upwards. We note that the VV used for McVeigh use "the same letter" (the Hebrew "vav") for an "O" in TIM O THY.

FIFTH, it is claimed that the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was encoded in the Bible, and that upon the author's discovering this in 1994, he attempted to warn the Prime Minister, who was tragically assassinated the following year on November 4, 1995 (pp. 13-18).

The computer noted the letters YTzChKRBIN (Tz being one letter, and Ch one letter) in a vertical column top to bottom, and then reused the Tz to form YRTzCh horizontally from right to left, which literally in four letters says, "He kills." This is the same word used in Exodus 20 in the sixth commandment, but there in Exodus 20 saying, "Not you-will-kill." "The Bible Code" also found Amir, the name of the assassin, but this time moving in a horizontal column in the A.....M.....Y.....R. Such an item certainly did not "inform" Prime Minister Rabin

that he would be killed, much less by an Amir. It is more like some odd friend phoning you and saying, "I found your name spelled vertically in the letters of a Bible verse I was reading, and the letters across spell "HARM," and I want to warn you to be careful!" With such messages abounding, no one would be safe. The Prime Minister made a courageous effort to suggest a peace method -- agree or disagree with him -- and in such a volatile moment was, of course, subject to an assassin, just as any world leader in a trouble spot would be. As I glance at the Hebrew grid on page 29, I see "Shlosh", "three," "Shamah", "hear," and "Shlam", the verb, "to be at peace, to be whole, or perfect" (Gesenius). We could, had the Prime Minister not been shot and his plan received, have then "discovered" YTZKRBIN at PEACE and HEARD. Thus it did not in fact provide an intelligent, understandable, meaningful prophecy, but a somewhat arbitrary interpretation of a group of letters out of which one could pull various and even opposite messages at will.

We understand with sympathy how Mr. Drosnin could deeply care for the Prime Minister and feel a true sense of alarm for him when he saw the words that he selected for isolation; but he did not "know" that this would take place beyond seeing an escalating antagonism against the Prime Minister by those who opposed his ideas. This is akin to using the biblical text as a Ouija board -- it can be pulled to the letters anticipated.

SIXTH, it is claimed that detailed prophecies of both ancient and modern historic events were encoded in the Bible (of course, in the Hebrew letters), such as:

CLINTON...PRESIDENT (p. 32) WATERGATE...PRESIDENT...KICKED OUT (Nixon, of course, p. 33) THE DEPRESSION...1929 (p. 34) MAN ON MOON...SPACESHIP (p. 35) OKLAHOMA...MURRAH BUILDING...HIS NAME IS TIMOTHY...McVEIGH (found on three separate letter grids; pp. 117-120) SHOEMAKER-LEVY...WILL POUND JUPITER... 8TH AV (July 16, 1994); (p. 36) DINOSAUR...ASTEROID...DRAGON...IT WILL STRIKE RAHAB (pp. 148-149)

On page 32, as I look at the Hebrew grid of letters which show circled vertically, KLYNTON (or KLYNTVN) and NSYA, "president, leader," right to left, I also see B U Sh (or BouSh) running diagonally upwards from lower right to upper left. Also, to the right, running horizontally I see L Sh M R (right to left, third line from bottom), meaning "to guard" or "to watch," and if Clinton lost, we could say that this grid says, "Clinton will watch" and not be president. There are also hundreds of other possible word and name combinations on this page alone. This is not a prophecy that Bill Clinton would become the President of the United States; it merely is a discovery in the vegetable soup of the available letters floating around with the computer's movements (versus the re-stirring of the alphabet soup until a favorable combination is found) that we can find words which match today's circumstances. I am sure that if we look we can find that BOING (Boeing) will FLY (in the Hebrew, of course). The same is true for these other combination names and events.

We should consider, however, "SHOEMAKER-LEVY" "WILL POUND JUPITER" "8TH AV" (July 16, 1994)" (p. 36). We must here note that the name of the comet which struck Jupiter was for the two men that were simultaneously credited with its discovery. Had either one not been looking through his telescope or super binoculars that week, or had others seen it first, it could have been labelled as KANG-PESTROSKY. What could provide the causality for such a dual label of the striking comet to be known in Moses' day? Does not even the foreknowledge of God depend on a causality, granted one infinitely superior to human minds? Is not the claim that "God knows the future" in its details, which we grant, nevertheless dependent on a divine causality? God named "Cyrus" the Persian in advance, both in His casual-analytical-providential knowledge of the future "and" by His will to make it so (Isa. 44:28-45:1). Did He, in the biblical text, really prophetically name this comet and the day it would strike -- or -- did someone find its name in the vegetable soup of the computer-generated, crossword puzzle letter grid?

SEVENTH, it is claimed that future prophecies have been uncovered, such as:

GREAT EARTHQUAKE...L.A. CALIF....IN 5770...5754 (5770 in the rabbinic calendar = 2010, and 5754 = 1994; pp. 141-142)

In 1994, there was an earthquake in Los Angeles. Was this really significant? There are earthquakes every year in this area. Then, with the Hebrew system of letters representing numbers (A, "aleph" in Hebrew = 1; B, "beth" = 2, etc., through the twenty-two letter Hebrew alphabet via, 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 200 300 400) and with there being hundreds of letters in each grid, and the year being able to be counted starting with any letter selected and then traveling in any direction, at any interval space, any year one wants to find can be easily selected. Will 2010 really be the year of "the big one"? There will surely be a few in 2010 if the Lord tarries. Is this really a prophecy or is it the message of the particular fortune cookie that our seeking hand has pulled out? On the grid of letters on page 142, we read diagonally, in a 3-down and 1-to-the-left pattern, L A K L Y F, which is interpreted as L.A., Calif. This is not prophecy; it is the game of finding words. Countless other locations and fates could be found. It depends on what you wish to spoon out of the alphabet soup.

EIGHTH, it is claimed that these things are evidence in the order of staggering odds and, with their historic results, give "absolute proof that the Bible code was real" (pp. 18, 43). The author, Michael Drosnin, however, does not go as far as some, that all this proves the existence of God, but more cautiously concludes, "I do not know if it is God. I only know that no human being could have encoded the Bible 3000 years ago, and accurately foretold the future . . . that we are not alone . . ." (p. 51).

Staggering odds or, rather, find what you wish, more or less? Here is a little comparison study, using the grid below, in English rather than Hebrew, but it will show the same results. The grid below is made up of the letters of Numbers 13:26-30, to which I arbitrarily opened my Bible. Imagine the possibilities when a computer program sizzles through pages of these letters, such

as in "The Bible Code", and highlights every word of three letters or more that is in the dictionary!

Here, then, is the Numbers 13:26-30, English Bible (King James Version) grid:

ANDTHEYWENTANDCAME TOMOSESANDTOAARONANDTOALLTHECONGREGATION OFTHECHILDREN OFISRAELUNTOTH
EWILDERNESS OFPARANTOKADESHANDBROUGHTBACKWO
RDUNTOTHEMANDUNTOALLTHECONGREGATIONANDSHO
WEDTHEM THEFRUIT OFTHELANDANDTHEYTOLDHIMANDS
AIDWE CAME UNTO THELANDWHITHER THOUSENTTESTUSAN
DSURELYITFLOWETH WITHMILKANDHONEYANDTHISISTHE
FRUIT OFITNEVERTHELESSTHEPEOPLEBESTRONGTHATDW
ELLINTHELANDANDTHECITIESAREWALLEDANDVERYGRE
ATANDMOREOVERWESA WTHECHILDREN OFANAKTHERETH
EAMALEKITESDWELLINTHELAND OFTHESOUTHANDTHEHI
TTITESANDTHEJEBUSITESANDTHEAMORITESDWELLINTH
EMOUNTAINSANDTHECANAANITESDWELLBYTHESEAANDB
YTHECOAST OFJORDANANDCALEBSTILLEDTHEPEOPLEBEF
OREMOSESANDSAIDLETUSGOUPAT

We understand that "The Bible Code" was working with a Hebrew letter grid and that the same could be done for the New Testament in Greek letters. Nevertheless, this will be illustrative. Also, do remember that Hebrew verbs are basically composed of three letters so it is much easier to find them than longer English verbs. Also, Hebrew does not use vowel letters in most words so they are shorter. "The Bible Code" often uses Anglicized words, i.e., English names spelled in Hebrew. For example, "lamed aleph," LA, is taken when desired as "Los Angeles," while this is, in fact, the Hebrew spelling of the word "no" or "not" in the Ten Commandments! Thus LA EARTHQUAKE could also be NO EARTHQUAKE!

In the lower right of our sample English grid, I see PLEBE JET TORY DOT. This may indicate that a West Point graduate will negotiate a very significant jet plane sale with the British and that the Department of Transportation will approve it. In the upper right corner note MEN CONG FAT, which could indicate that a group (congregation) of fat men will probably form a weight-loss company. In the upper left section we see RANT HOT ROT OUR RID DAD. This may indicate that there will be public complaining (ranting) against rotten hot food, and some significant "dad" will rid us of the problem. The lower left words END EON TET clearly show that the North Vietnamese TET offensive would be the mark of ending that eon of time which saw the United States involved in the Vietnam War. In the left center, RON NEO NEV may signify that former President Ronald Reagan will soon become a new (neo) resident of Nevada. The lower left words LA COAST SAND and TOES clearly indicate that the Los Angeles coastal region, with all of its sand beaches, will have some problem, and wise people will get on their toes, i.e., begin to move out of the area. The upper center words, MALE HID ROUGH

WOE LOW and TIN, may indicate that certain males in the tin industry are going to have a rough time of woe as the tin supply is becoming so low. They will have to hide, signified by HID, or at least will have to start putting away funds for this coming rough low time of woe.

With some hunting on your own, you will undoubtedly find many more significant words and names. Our example did not really get into words spelled from bottom up, or from right to left, and those with intervals, such as every fifth letter, etc. A computer program could flash such out to us rapidly, and then "we could arbitrarily choose" those meaningful to us. This is fun, but is it really prophecy? Could you obtain advance information, say as to who might be president in twenty years from this? The answer is clearly "NO."

Hopefully, this sample, admittedly in the English instead of the Hebrew, demonstrates that we are not dealing with prophecy so much as we are dealing with finding in the vats of crossword puzzle letter grids items which we happen to see, or which we choose to see. We then read significance into these. Interesting it is, but surely this is not the message of the Bible that God wants us to receive. We read in His Word:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Thus, Christ came teaching, not that we should look for word riddles hidden in the letters, but rather that we should look to the meaning of the Scriptures which spoke of Him, and of God's love and mercy, and of His will for our lives. That is the "code" to live by.

(Dr. Cohen is professor and chairman of the Department of Biblical Studies at Trinity International University, South Florida Campus. He is also president of Cohen Theological Seminary, Bellflower (Los Angeles), California, with branches in Seoul and Pusan, Korea, and in several other countries. He retired as a military chaplain, USAR, holding the rank of Colonel.)